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20 AUG 2003

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4. Title of the invention

BIOLOGICAL PRODUCTS

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

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Claim(s) 2

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AMANDA BLANCHARD

Date 20th August 2003

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Dr AMANDA BLANCHARD

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BIOLOGICAL PRODUCTS

The present invention relates to improved antibody fragments and more specifically provides improved antibody fragments to which one or more, preferably two or more, effector molecules are attached and methods for their production.

The high specificity and affinity of antibody variable regions make them ideal diagnostic and therapeutic agents, particularly for modulating protein:protein interactions. Antibody fragments are proving to be versatile therapeutic agents, as seen by the recent success of products such as ReoPro®. The targeting function encoded in Fv, Fab, Fab', F(ab)₂ and other antibody fragments can be used directly or can be conjugated to one or more effector molecules such as cytotoxic drugs, toxins or polymer molecules to increase efficacy. For example, since these fragments lack an Fc region they have a short circulating half-life in animals but this can be improved by conjugation to certain types of polymer such as polyethylene glycol (PEG). Increasing the size of the conjugated PEG has been shown to increase the circulating half-life from minutes to many hours and modification of a Fab' with PEG ranging from 5kDa to 100kDa has been demonstrated (Chapman *et al.*, 1999, Nature Biotechnology, 17, 780-783; Leong *et al.*, 2001, Cytokine, 16, 106-119; Chapman, 2002, Advanced Drug Delivery Reviews, 54, 531-545). PEGylated antibody fragments such as CDP870 are currently undergoing clinical trials where the effect of the conjugated PEG is to bring the circulating half-life to acceptable levels for therapy.

Effector molecules may be attached to antibody fragments by a number of different methods, including through aldehyde sugars or more commonly through any available amino acid side-chain or terminal amino acid functional group located in the antibody fragment, for example any free amino, imino, thiol, hydroxyl or carboxyl group. The site of attachment of effector molecules can be either random or site specific.

Random attachment is often achieved through amino acids such as lysine and this results in effector molecules being attached at a number of sites throughout the antibody fragment depending on the position of the lysines. While this has been successful in some cases the exact location and number of effector molecules attached cannot be controlled and this can lead to loss of activity for example if too few are attached and/or loss of affinity if for example they interfere with the binding site (Chapman 2002 Advanced Drug Delivery Reviews, 54, 531-545). As a result, controlled site specific attachment of effector molecules is usually the method of choice.

Site specific attachment of effector molecules is most commonly achieved by attachment to cysteine residues since such residues are relatively uncommon in antibody fragments. Antibody hinges are popular regions for site specific attachment since these contain cysteine residues and are remote from other regions of the antibody likely to be involved in antigen binding. Suitable hinges either occur naturally in the fragment or may be created using recombinant DNA techniques (See for example US 5,677,425; WO98/25971; Leong *et al.*, 2001 Cytokine, 16, 106-119; Chapman *et al.*, 1999 Nature Biotechnology, 17, 780-783). Alternatively, or in addition, site specific cysteines may be engineered into the antibody fragment for example to create surface exposed cysteine(s) (US 5,219,996).

Where effector molecules are to be site specifically attached via a cysteine, the target thiol in the antibody fragment is often capped by a small fermentation related peptide product such as glutathione or deliberately capped by a chemical additive used during antibody fragment extraction and purification such as 5,5'-dithiobis (2-nitrobenzoic acid) (DTNB). These capping agents need to be removed to activate the target (hinge or surface) thiol. Antibody fragments have a native interchain disulphide bond between the heavy and light chain constant regions (C_{H1} and C_L) that has generally been regarded as critical in maintaining the stability and binding properties of the antibody. As a result the activation of the target hinge or surface thiol must be carried out with some care such that the inter $C_L:C_{H1}$ disulphide remains intact. Hence 'mild' reducing conditions are conventionally used to remove the thiol capping agent prior to reaction with the effector molecule. This is usually achieved by using thiol based reductants such as β -mercaptoethanol (β -ME), β -mercaptoethylamine (β -MA) and dithiothreitol (DTT). However, each of these reductants is known to be able to react with and stay attached to the cysteine which it is meant to reduce (Begg and Speicher, 1999 Journal of Biomolecular techniques, 10,17-20) thereby reducing the efficiency of effector molecule attachment. Hence, following reduction and reaction with effector molecules, a large proportion of the antibody fragments do not have any effector molecules attached and these have to be purified away from the antibody fragments that have the correct number of effector molecules attached. This poor efficiency of modification is clearly a disadvantage during the large-scale production of modified therapeutic antibody fragments where it is important that maximum production efficiency is achieved.

The present invention provides a new class of antibody Fab fragments to which effector molecules may be attached. A particular advantage of these fragments lies in the

cysteine residues present in these fragments that may be used for site specific effector molecule attachment avoiding the need to engineer modified hinge regions and/or surface amino acid substitutions. When effector molecules are attached to the antibody Fab fragments of the present invention there are no inter-chain covalent linkages between the heavy and light chain. A further advantage of these fragments therefore lies in the ease of attachment of effector molecules to the fragments, and in particular, the efficiency of attachment. The fragments thus provide a low cost alternative to currently available fragments in which the native inter-chain covalent linkages are retained following effector molecule attachment.

Thus according to the present invention there is provided an antibody Fab fragment characterized in that the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} .

The antibody Fab fragment of the present invention may be any heavy chain and light chain pair having a variable (V_H/V_L) and constant region (C_H/C_L). Preferably the heavy and light chain pair is V_H/C_{H1} and V_L/C_L covalently linked through interchain cysteines in the heavy and light chain constant regions. The term 'interchain cysteine' as used herein refers to a cysteine in the heavy or light chain constant region that would be disulphide linked to a cysteine in the corresponding heavy or light chain constant region encoded in a naturally occurring germline antibody gene. In particular the interchain cysteines of the present invention are a cysteine in the constant region of the light chain (C_L) and a cysteine in the first constant region of the heavy chain (C_{H1}) that are disulphide linked to each other in naturally occurring antibodies. Examples of such cysteines may typically be found at position 214 of the light chain and 233 of the heavy chain of human IgG1, 127 of the heavy chain of human IgM, IgE, IgG2, IgG3, IgG4 and 128 of the heavy chain of human IgD and IgA2B, as defined by Kabat *et al.*, 1987, in Sequences of Proteins of Immunological Interest, US Department of Health and Human Services, NIH, USA. It will be appreciated that the exact positions of these cysteines may vary from that of naturally occurring antibodies if any modifications, such as deletions, insertions and/or substitutions have been made to the antibody Fab fragment.

In the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} . Hence the last amino acid in the C_{H1} domain of the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention is a cysteine. The antibody Fab fragment of the present invention in which the C_{H1} domain is truncated may be prepared by

any suitable method known in the art. For example, the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention may be obtained from any whole antibody, especially a whole monoclonal antibody, using any suitable enzymatic cleavage and/or digestion techniques, for example by treatment with pepsin or papain and c-terminal proteases. Preferably the antibody Fab
5 fragment of the present invention is prepared by the use of recombinant DNA techniques involving the manipulation and re-expression of DNA encoding antibody variable and constant regions. Standard molecular biology techniques may be used to modify, add or delete further amino acids or domains as desired. Any alterations to the variable or constant regions are still encompassed by the terms 'variable' and 'constant' regions as used herein.
10 Preferably PCR is used to introduce a stop codon immediately following the codon encoding the interchain cysteine of CH1, such that translation of the CH1 domain stops at the interchain cysteine. Methods for designing suitable PCR primers are well known in the art and the sequences of antibody C_H1 domains are readily available (Kabat *et al.*, *supra*). Alternatively stop codons may be introduced using site-directed mutagenesis techniques
15 such as those described in White (Ed.), PCR Protocols: Current Methods and Applications (1993)

The antibody fragment starting material of the present invention may be derived from any antibody isotype including for example IgG, IgM, IgA, IgD and IgE and subclasses thereof including for example IgG1, IgG2, IgG3 and IgG4. Preferably the antibody Fab
20 fragment of the present invention is derived from IgG1. The antibody fragment starting material may be obtained from any species including for example mouse, rat, rabbit, pig, hamster, camel, llama, goat or human. Parts of the antibody fragment may be obtained from more than one species for example the antibody fragments may be chimeric. In one example the constant regions are from one species and the variable regions from another.
25 The antibody fragment starting material may also be modified. In one example the variable region of the antibody fragment has been created using recombinant DNA engineering techniques. Such engineered versions include those created for example from natural antibody variable regions by insertions, deletions or changes in or to the amino acid sequences of the natural antibodies. Particular examples of this type include those
30 engineered variable region domains containing at least one CDR and optionally one or more framework amino acids from one antibody and the remainder of the variable region domain from a second antibody. The methods for creating and manufacturing these antibody fragments are well known in the art (see for example, Boss *et al.*, US 4,816,397; Cabilly *et*

al., US 6,331,415; Shrader et al., WO 92/02551; Orlandi et al., 1989, Proc.Natl.Acad.Sci. USA, 86, 3833; Riechmann et al., 1988, Nature, 322, 323; Queen et al., US 5,585,089; Adair, WO91/09967; Mountain and Adair, 1992, Biotechnol. Genet. Eng. Rev, 10, 1-142; Verma et al., 1998, Journal of Immunological Methods, 216, 165-181).

5 Also provided by the present invention is a host cell expressing an antibody Fab fragment in which the C_H1 domain terminates at the interchain cysteine. Any suitable host cell/vector system may be used for the expression of the DNA sequences encoding the antibody Fab intermediate of the present invention. Bacterial, for example *E.coli*, and other microbial systems may be used or eukaryotic, for example mammalian host cell expression
10 systems may also be used. Suitable *E.coli* strains for use in the present invention may be naturally occurring strains or mutated strains capable of producing recombinant proteins. Examples of specific host *E.coli* strains include MC4100, TG1, TG2, DHB4, DH5 α , DH1, BL21, XL1Blue and W3110 (ATCC 27,325). Suitable mammalian host cells include CHO, myeloma or hybridoma cells. Also provided is a method of producing the antibody Fab
15 fragment of the present invention comprising culturing the host cell expressing the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention and isolating said fragment. Once produced in the host cell the antibody Fab fragment may be extracted and purified using any suitable method known in the art. Heat extraction may be used as described in US 5,665,866 due to the presence of the interchain disulphide bond. Suitable purification methods include but are not
20 limited to size exclusion, hydrophobic interaction chromatography, protein A, G or L affinity chromatography and ion exchange.

If desired, the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention may have one or more effector molecules attached to it. The term effector molecule as used herein includes, for example, antineoplastic agents, drugs, toxins (such as enzymatically active toxins of
25 bacterial or plant origin and fragments thereof e.g. ricin and fragments thereof) biologically active proteins, for example enzymes, other antibody or antibody fragments, synthetic or naturally occurring polymers, nucleic acids and fragments thereof e.g. DNA, RNA and fragments thereof, radionuclides, particularly radioiodide, radioisotopes, chelated metals, nanoparticles and reporter groups such as fluorescent compounds or compounds which may
30 be detected by NMR or ESR spectroscopy.

Particular antineoplastic agents include cytotoxic and cytostatic agents for example alkylating agents, such as nitrogen mustards (e.g. chlorambucil, melphalan,

mechlorethamine, cyclophosphamide, or uracil mustard) and derivatives thereof, triethylenephosphoramidate, triethylenethiophosphoramide, busulphan, or cisplatin; antimetabolites, such as methotrexate, fluorouracil, floxuridine, cytarabine, mercaptopurine, thioguanine, fluoroacetic acid, or fluorocitric acid, antibiotics, such as bleomycins (e.g. bleomycin sulphate), doxorubicin, daunorubicin, mitomycins (e.g. mitomycin C), actionmycins (e.g. dactinomycin) plicamycin, calichaemicin and derivatives thereof, or esperamicin and derivatives thereof; mitotic inhibitors, such as etoposide, vincristine or vinblastine and derivatives thereof; alkaloids such as ellipticine; polyols such as taxicin-I or taxicin-II; hormones, such as androgens (e.g. dromostanolone or testolactone), progestins (e.g. megestrol acetate or medroxyprogesterone acetate), estrogens (e.g. dimethylstilbestrol diphosphate, polyestradiol phosphate or estramustine phosphate) or antiestrogens (e.g. tamoxifen); anthraquinones, such as mitoxantrone, ureas, such as hydroxyurea; hydrazines, such as procarbazine; or imidazoles, such as dacarbazine.

Chelated metals include chelates of di- or tripositive metals having a coordination number from 2 to 8 inclusive. Particular examples of such metals include technetium (Tc), rhenium (Re), cobalt (Co), copper (Cu), gold (Au), silver (Ag), lead (Pb), bismuth (Bi), indium (In), gallium (Ga), yttrium (Y), terbium (Tb), gadolinium (Gd), and scandium (Sc). In general the metal is preferably a radionuclide. Particular radionuclides include ^{99m}Tc , ^{186}Re , ^{188}Re , ^{58}Co , ^{60}Co , ^{67}Cu , ^{195}Au , ^{199}Au , ^{110}Ag , ^{203}Pb , ^{206}Bi , ^{207}Bi , ^{111}In , ^{67}Ga , ^{68}Ga , ^{88}Y , ^{90}Y , ^{160}Tb , ^{153}Gd and ^{47}Sc .

The chelated metal may be for example one of the above types of metal chelated with any suitable polydentate chelating agent, for example acyclic or cyclic polyamines, polyethers, (e.g. crown ethers and derivatives thereof); polyamides; porphyrins; and carbocyclic derivatives.

In general, the type of chelating agent will depend on the metal in use. One particularly useful group of chelating agents in conjugates according to the invention, however, are acyclic and cyclic polyamines, especially polyaminocarboxylic acids, for example diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid and derivatives thereof, and macrocyclic amines, e.g. cyclic tri-aza and tetra-aza derivatives (for example as described in International Patent Specification No. WO 92/22583); and polyamides, especially desferrioxamine and derivatives thereof.

Synthetic or naturally occurring polymers include, for example optionally substituted straight or branched chain polyalkylene, polyalkenylene, or polyoxyalkylene polymers or branched or unbranched polysaccharides, e.g. a homo- or hetero- polysaccharide such as lactose, amylose, dextran or glycogen.

5 Particular optional substituents which may be present on the above-mentioned synthetic polymers include one or more hydroxy, methyl or methoxy groups. Particular examples of synthetic polymers include optionally substituted straight or branched chain poly(ethyleneglycol), poly(propyleneglycol), poly(vinylalcohol) or derivatives thereof, especially optionally substituted poly(ethyleneglycol) such as methoxypoly(ethyleneglycol)
10 or derivatives thereof.

"Derivatives" as used herein is intended to include reactive derivatives, for example thiol-selective reactive groups such as an α -halocarboxylic acid or ester, e.g. iodoacetamide, an imide, e.g. maleimide, a vinyl sulphone or disulphide maleimides and the like. The reactive group may be linked directly or through a linker segment to the polymer.
15 It will be appreciated that the residue of such a group will in some instances form part of the product as the linking group between the antibody fragment and the polymer.

The size of the polymer may be varied as desired, but will generally be in an average molecular weight range from 500Da to 50,000Da, preferably from 5,000 to 40,000Da and more preferably from 10,000 to 40,000Da and 20,000 to 40,000Da. The polymer size may in
20 particular be selected on the basis of the intended use of the product. Thus, for example, where the product is intended to leave the circulation and penetrate tissue, for example for use in the treatment of a tumor, it may be advantageous to use a small molecular weight polymer, for example with a molecular weight of around 5,000Da. For applications where the product remains in the circulation, it may be advantageous to use a higher molecular
25 weight polymer, for example having a molecular weight in the range from 20,000Da to 40,000Da.

Particularly preferred polymers include a polyalkylene polymer, such as a poly(ethyleneglycol) or, especially, a methoxypoly(ethyleneglycol) or a derivative thereof, and especially with a molecular weight in the range from about 10,000Da to about
30 40,000Da.

The polymers of the present invention may be obtained commercially (for example from Nippon Oil and Fats; Nektar Therapeutics) or may be prepared from commercially available starting materials using conventional chemical procedures.

Effector molecules may be attached using standard chemical or recombinant DNA procedures in which the antibody fragment is linked either directly or via a coupling agent to the effector molecule. Particular chemical procedures include for example those described in International Patent Specification numbers WO 93/06231, WO92/22583, WO90/09195, WO89/01476, WO9915549 and WO03031581. Alternatively, where the effector molecule is a protein or polypeptide the linkage may be achieved using recombinant DNA procedures, for example as described in European Patent Specification No. 392745.

The effector molecules may be attached to the antibody fragment of the present invention through any available amino acid side-chain or terminal amino acid functional group located in the antibody fragment, for example any free amino, imino, thiol, hydroxyl or carboxyl group. Such amino acids may occur naturally in the antibody fragment or may be engineered into the fragment using recombinant DNA methods. See for example US 5,219,996. Preferably effector molecules are covalently linked through a thiol group of a cysteine residue located in the antibody fragment. The covalent linkage will generally be a disulphide bond or, in particular, a sulphur-carbon bond. Where a thiol group is used as the point of attachment appropriately activated effector molecules, for example thiol selective derivatives such as maleimides and cysteine derivatives may be used.

In a preferred aspect of the present invention at least one of the effector molecules attached to the antibody fragment is a polymer molecule, preferably PEG or a derivative thereof. As regards attaching poly(ethyleneglycol) (PEG) moieties in general, reference is made to "Poly(ethyleneglycol) Chemistry, Biotechnical and Biomedical Applications", 1992, J.Milton Harris (ed), Plenum Press, New York; "Poly(ethyleneglycol) Chemistry and Biological Applications", 1997, J. Milton Harris and S.Zalipsky (eds), American Chemical Society, Washington DC and "Bioconjugation Protein Coupling Techniques for the Biomedical Sciences", 1998, M. Aslam and A. Dent, Grove Publishers, New York.

Preferably all the effector molecules attached to the Fab fragment of the present invention are PEG and each molecule is covalently linked via a maleimide group to one or more thiol groups in the antibody fragment. The PEG may be any straight or branched molecule. To attach branched PEG molecules, a lysine residue is preferably covalently

linked to the maleimide group. To each of the amine groups on the lysine residue is preferably attached a methoxypoly(ethyleneglycol) polymer. In one example the molecular weight of each polymer attached to the lysine is approximately 20,000Da and the total molecular weight of the entire polymer molecule is therefore approximately 40,000Da.

5 Preferably the PEG molecules attached to the Fab fragment of the present invention are linear.

One or more effector molecules may be attached to the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention. In a preferred aspect at least two effector molecules are attached to the Fab fragment, one to a cysteine in the light chain constant region and one to a cysteine in the heavy chain constant region. Preferably the cysteine residues to which the effector molecules are attached would otherwise be linked to each other by a disulphide bond if the effector molecules were not attached. Suitable cysteines for attachment include naturally occurring cysteines present in the light and/or heavy chain constant region such as the interchain cysteines. In a preferred aspect of the invention an effector molecule is attached to the interchain cysteine of C_L and the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} in the antibody Fab fragment. Other suitable cysteines include those that have been engineered into the constant regions using recombinant DNA techniques. For example two cysteines may be engineered into the antibody fragment, one in each of the heavy and light chain constant regions, preferably at positions whereby they can form a disulphide linkage with each other.

20 Particular fragments according to this aspect of the invention include those where:

- (i) the cysteine residues in the heavy and light chain constant regions which are attached to effector molecules would otherwise be linked to each other via a disulphide bond if the effector molecules were not attached or
- (ii) the light chain cysteine to which an effector molecule is attached is the interchain cysteine of C_L and the heavy chain cysteine to which an effector molecule is attached is the interchain cysteine of C_{H1}

25 During attachment of effector molecules to cysteines in the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention any covalent linkages between the cysteines are removed, as described herein, using a reducing agent. In such fragments the heavy chain is no longer covalently bonded to the light chain and the disulphide linkage found in naturally occurring antibodies between the interchain cysteine of C_L and the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} is absent.

30

Also provided by the present invention therefore is a method for attaching effector molecules to the antibody Fab fragments of the present invention, said method comprising:

- i) Treating an antibody Fab fragment of the present invention with a reducing agent capable of generating a free thiol group in a cysteine of the heavy and light chain constant region
- ii) Reacting the treated fragment with an effector molecule

In a preferred aspect the method comprises:

- i) Reducing the interchain disulphide bond between the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} and the interchain cysteine of C_L in the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention
- ii) Reacting the treated fragment with an effector molecule

The methods provided by the present invention enable one or more effector molecule(s) to be attached to cysteines in the antibody fragment, in particular to cysteines in the constant region. Two or more effector molecules can be attached to the antibody fragment using the methods described herein either simultaneously or sequentially by repeating the method.

Additional effector molecules may be attached elsewhere in the antibody fragment, in particular the constant regions. The methods of the present invention therefore also extend to one or more steps before and/or after the reduction methods described above in which further effector molecules are attached to the antibody fragment using any suitable method as described previously, for example via other available amino acids side chains such as amino and imino groups.

The reducing agent for use in the methods of the present invention is any reducing agent capable of reducing cysteines in the antibody Fab fragment of the present invention to produce free thiols. Preferably the reducing agent reduces the interchain disulphide bond between cysteines of the heavy and light chain constant regions, for example, between the interchain cysteine of C_L and the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} , in order to allow attachment of effector molecules to said cysteines. As the antibody Fab fragments of the present invention have no requirement for the interchain disulphide bond stronger reducing agents can be used than are conventionally used with wild type antibody fragments which retain the interchain disulphide bond. As a result a higher number of Fab molecules with free thiols are

produced and a higher proportion of the antibody fragments are correctly modified. In addition, the terminal interchain cysteine of C_H1 in the antibody Fab fragments of the present invention is more highly accessible for effector molecule attachment and reduction than in conventional Fab fragments where there may be steric or local electrostatic effects due to the presence of the upper hinge or other amino acids C-terminal to the C_H1 interchain cysteine. The antibody fragments of the present invention can therefore be modified more efficiently and cost effectively than conventional antibody fragments. It will be clear to a person skilled in the art that suitable reducing agents may be identified by determining the number of free thiols produced after the antibody fragment is treated with the reducing agent. Methods for determining the number of free thiols are well known in the art, see for example Lyons *et al.*, 1990, Protein Engineering, 3, 703. Reducing agents for use in the present invention are widely known in the art for example those described in Singh *et al.*, 1995, Methods in Enzymology, 251, 167-73. Particular examples include thiol based reducing agents such as reduced glutathione (GSH), β -mercaptoethanol (β -ME), β -mercaptoethylamine (β -MA) and dithiothreitol (DTT). Other methods for reducing the antibody fragments of the present invention include using electrolytic methods, such as the method described in Leach *et al.*, 1965, Div. Protein. Chem, 4, 23-27 and using photoreduction methods, such as the method described in Ellison *et al.*, 2000, Biotechniques, 28 (2), 324-326. Preferably however, the reducing agent for use in the present invention is a non-thiol based reducing agent capable of liberating one or more thiols in an antibody fragment. Preferably the non-thiol based reducing agent is capable of liberating the interchain thiols in an antibody fragment. Preferred reducing agents for use in the present invention are trialkylphosphine reducing agents (Ruegg UT and Fudinger, J., 1977, Methods in Enzymology, 47, 111-126; Burns J *et al.*, 1991, J.Org.Chem, 56, 2648-2650), particular examples of which include tris(2-carboxyethyl)phosphine (TCEP), tris butyl phosphine (TBP), tris-(2-cyanoethyl) phosphine and tris-(2-hydroxyethyl) phosphine. Most preferably the reducing agent for use in the present invention is TCEP. It will be clear to a person skilled in the art that the concentration of reducing agent for use in the present invention can be determined empirically, for example, by varying the concentration of reducing agent and measuring the number of free thiols produced. Typically the reducing agent for use in the present invention is used in excess over the antibody fragment for example between 2 and 1000 fold molar excess. Preferably the reducing agent is in 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 100 or 1000 fold excess.

The modified antibody Fab fragments according to the invention may be prepared by reacting an antibody Fab fragment containing at least one reactive cysteine residue with an effector molecule, preferably a thiol-selective activated effector molecule. The reaction may generally be performed in a solvent, for example an aqueous buffer solution such as acetate or phosphate, at around neutral pH, for example around pH 4.5 to around pH 8.0. The reaction may generally be performed at any suitable temperature, for example between about 5°C and about 70°C, for example at room temperature. The solvent may optionally contain EDTA at between 1 and 5mM, preferably 2mM. The effector molecule will generally be employed in excess concentration relative to the concentration of the antibody fragment. Typically the effector molecule is in between 2 and 100 fold molar excess, preferably 5, 10 or 50 fold excess.

Where necessary, the desired product containing the desired number of effector molecules may be separated from any starting materials or other product generated during the production process by conventional means, for example by chromatography techniques such as ion exchange, size exclusion, protein A, G or L affinity chromatography or hydrophobic interaction chromatography.

Also provided by the present invention is a mixture containing two or more antibody Fab fragments, characterized in that the mixture is enriched for Fab fragments in which the heavy chain constant domain terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} , the heavy chains in the fragments are not covalently bonded to the light chains and the fragments have an effector molecule attached to a cysteine in the light chain and the heavy chain constant region. Said mixture may be produced using the methods provided by the present invention. By 'enriched' we mean that the antibody Fab fragment with the desired number of effector molecules attached accounts for 50% or greater of the mixture. Preferably the antibody Fab fragment with the desired number of effector molecules attached accounts for between 50 and 99% of the mixture. Preferably the mixtures are enriched by greater than 50%, preferably greater than 60%, more preferably greater than 70%. The proportion of such mixtures containing the antibody Fab fragment with the desired number of effector molecules may be determined by using the size exclusion HPLC methods described herein.

The antibody fragments according to the invention may be useful in the detection or treatment of a number of diseases or disorders. Such diseases or disorders may include those described under the general heading of infectious disease, e.g. bacterial infection; fungal infection; inflammatory disease/autoimmunity e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis,

inflammatory bowel disease; cancer; allergic/atopic disease e.g. asthma, eczema; congenital disease, e.g. cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia; dermatologic disease e.g. psoriasis; neurologic disease, e.g. multiple sclerosis; transplants e.g. organ transplant rejection, graft-versus-host disease; and metabolic/idiopathic disease e.g. diabetes.

- 5 The antibody fragments according to the invention may be formulated for use in therapy and/or diagnosis and according to a further aspect of the invention we provide a pharmaceutical composition comprising an antibody Fab fragment in which the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} together with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable excipients, diluents or carriers. Also provided is a
- 10 pharmaceutical composition comprising an antibody Fab fragment in which the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1} , the heavy chain is not covalently bonded to the light chain and the fragment has an effector molecule attached to a cysteine in the light chain and the heavy chain constant region, together with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable excipients, diluents or carriers.

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EXAMPLES

The present invention will now be described by way of example only, in which reference is made to:

- 20 Figure 1: Non-reducing SDS-PAGE of PEGylated g163 Fab in which the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of C_{H1}

Example 1 Creation of a novel truncated Fab fragment

- 25 The starting antibody Fab molecule was g163 which binds to baboon platelet-derived growth factor receptor (PDGFr). PCR primers were designed based on the human IgG1 CH1 region and PCR mutagenesis used to insert a stop codon immediately following the interchain cysteine of CH1. The sequences of the heavy and light chain constant regions are shown below:

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Wild type Human $\gamma 1$ Fab constant regions:

Kappa

KRTVAAPSVFIFPPSDEQLKSGTASVVCLLNNFYPREAKVQWKVDNALQSGNSQES
VTEQDSKDSSTYSLSSTLTLSKADYEKHKVYACEVTHQGLSSPVTKSFNRGEC*

CH1

ASTKGPSVFPLAPSSKSTSGGTAALGCLVKDYFPEPVTVSWNSGALTSGVHTFPAVL
QSSGLYSLSSVVTVPSSSLGTQTYICNVNHKPSNTKVDKKVEPKSCDKTHTCAA*

Human 'truncated' γ 1 Fab constant regions:

Kappa

KRTVAAPSVFIFPPSDEQLKSGTASVVCLLNNFYPREAKVQWKVDNALQSGNSQES
VTEQDSKDSSTYSLSSTLTLSKADYEKHKVYACEVTHQGLSSPVTKSFNRGEC*

CH1

ASTKGPSVFPLAPSSKSTSGGTAALGCLVKDYFPEPVTVSWNSGALTSGVHTFPAVL
QSSGLYSLSSVVTVPSSSLGTQTYICNVNHKPSNTKVDKKVEPKSC*

- 15 The truncated Fab fragment was produced in *E. coli* strain W3110 and purified using standard methods (Humphreys et al., 2002, Protein Expression and Purification, 26, 309-320).

Example 2 Creation of a novel PEGylated truncated Fab fragment

- 20 All reductions and PEGylations were performed in 0.1M Phosphate pH6.0; 2mM EDTA. The concentration of Fab was 5mg/ml and reductant was at 40mM final concentration. In all cases reduction was performed at room temperature (~24°C) for 30 minutes, the proteins desalted on a PD-10 column (Pharmacia) and then mixed with 5 fold molar excess of 20kDa
- 25 PEG-maleimide over Fab. The 20 kDa PEG was from Nippon Oils and Fats (NOF). PEGylated Fab was separated from unPEGylated Fab by size exclusion HPLC on analytical Zorbax GF-450 and GF-250 columns in series. These were developed with a 30min isocratic gradient of 0.2M phosphate pH 7.0 + 10% ethanol at 1ml/min and Fab detected using absorbance at 214nm and 280nm.

- 30 The g163 truncated Fab was reduced using two non thiol based reducing agents, tris(2-carboxyethyl)phosphine (TCEP), tris butyl phosphine (TBP) and two 20kDa PEG molecules attached to the interchain cysteines. PEGylation was expected to occur on both cysteines if the inter-chain disulphide was reduced. The PEGylation of both sites was confirmed by non-
- 35 reducing SDS-PAGE (Figure 1). Lane B corresponds to g163 truncated Fab with two PEG molecules attached following reduction with TCEP. The two high molecular weight bands very close together around 100kDa are composed of heavy and light chain with one PEG

molecule attached. The lower band at around 45kDa is a small amount of unmodified Fab with no PEG attached. The lower band at around 25kDa is free heavy and light chains.

Lane D is the same fragment reduced using TBP that is less compatible with aqueous buffers and proteins. The percentage of the g163 truncated Fab to be diPEGylated using TCEP and

5 TBP as reductants was 76% and 21% respectively, as determined by HPLC. TCEP is therefore a useful reducing agent for producing the modified antibody fragments of the present invention.

CLAIMS

1. An antibody Fab fragment characterized in that the heavy chain constant region terminates at the interchain cysteine of CH1.
- 5 2. The antibody Fab fragment of claim 1 to which one or more effector molecules are attached.
3. The antibody Fab fragment of claim 2 to which two or more effector molecules are attached.
4. The antibody fragment of claim 3, wherein an effector molecule is attached to a
10 cysteine in the light chain constant region and a cysteine in the heavy chain constant region.
5. The antibody fragment of claim 4, wherein the cysteine residues in the heavy and light chain constant regions which are attached to effector molecules would otherwise be linked to each other via a disulphide bond if the effector molecules were
15 not attached.
6. The antibody fragment of claim 5 where the light chain cysteine to which an effector molecule is attached is the interchain cysteine of C_L and the heavy chain cysteine to which an effector molecule is attached is the interchain cysteine of C_H1.
7. The antibody fragment of claim 6 where the interchain cysteine of C_L is at position
20 214 of the light chain and the interchain cysteine of C_H1 is at position 233 of the heavy chain.
8. The antibody fragment of claim 6 where the interchain cysteine of C_L is at position 214 of the light chain and the interchain cysteine of C_H1 is at position 127 of the heavy chain.
- 25 9. The antibody fragment of claim 6 where the interchain cysteine of C_L is at position 214 of the light chain and the interchain cysteine of C_H1 is at position 128 of the heavy chain.
10. A method of producing an antibody Fab fragment according to claims 2-9 comprising:
30
 - a. Treating an antibody Fab fragment according to claim 1 with a reducing agent capable of generating a free thiol group in a cysteine of the heavy and light chain constant region
 - b. Reacting the treated fragment with an effector molecule

11. The method according to claim 10 in which the reducing agent is a non-thiol based reductant.
12. The method according to claim 11 where the non-thiol based reductant is TCEP.
13. A mixture containing two or more antibody Fab fragments, characterized in that the mixture is enriched for Fab fragments in which the C_{H1} domain terminates at the interchain cysteine, the heavy chains in the fragments are not covalently bonded to the light chains and the fragments have an effector molecule attached to a cysteine in the light chain and the heavy chain constant region.
14. The mixture of claim 13 in which greater than 50% of the mixture comprises a Fab fragment in which the $CH1$ domain terminates at the interchain cysteine, the heavy chains in the fragments are not covalently bonded to the light chains and the fragments have an effector molecule attached to a cysteine in the light chain and the heavy chain constant region.
15. The antibody Fab fragment of claims 2-14 wherein the effector molecule is PEG
16. A host cell expressing the antibody Fab fragment of claim 1.
17. A process for producing the antibody Fab fragment of claim 1 comprising culturing the host cell of claim 16 and isolating said fragment.
18. A pharmaceutical composition comprising an antibody Fab fragment according to claims 1-9 and 13-15, together with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable excipients, diluents or carriers.